

Recreation on State Forest Lands

The recreational use of State Forest land is quite varied. Some of the most common activities include scenic driving, hunting, camping, hiking and nature watching. Some of the less common uses include hang gliding, dog-sledding, and kayaking. Listed below is an inventory of many of the most common uses and the sites, resources and facilities available to accommodate those users. More information can be found on the DCNR Bureau of Forestry web site at: www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/recreation.aspx

Organized and Commercial Activities

DCNR's Bureau of Forestry is charged with minimizing conflicts among State Forest users and ensuring our natural resources are managed in an environmentally sound manner. The forests are often used for organized events and commercial activities. We manage and govern decisions on the appropriateness of each request through one of three agreement methods.

- ***Letter of Authorization*** - A Letter of Authorization (LOA) is required for any group or organized activity that poses minimal threat of damage to the environment on State Forest land. Examples include scout camporees, weddings, and organized hikes.
- ***Special Activities Agreement*** - A Special Activities Agreement (SAA) allows the Bureau of Forestry to permit and control activities that are organized, possibly dangerous, large or otherwise atypical of common individual forest visitor activities. These include races, contests, and other competitive event
- ***Commercial Activities Agreement*** - A Commercial Activities Agreement (CAA) covers activities in which a person, organization or association conducts a for-profit event, where fees are charged above and beyond the administrative costs of the activity. It basically covers the same type of activities and events as a SAA, with the added fact that a profit is being realized. This agreement is also a contract and contains event-specific language and requirements.

Any organized or group event occurring on State Forest lands must be reviewed and approved through one of these means. Please contact the appropriate DCNR-Bureau of Forestry District Office with details of your request. Activities will be reviewed and, if determined appropriate, regulated through one of the above tools.

Camping

Camping on State Forest lands is defined as overnight lodging using standard camping equipment, and is categorized into three different types: primitive camping, motorized camping, and group camping.

- ***Primitive Camping*** is defined as overnight camping where all equipment is transported in limited trips by non-motorized vehicle methods and where a motorized vehicle is not located near or part of the camping experience. Virtually all State Forest lands are open for primitive camping. Review the *Primitive Camping Guidelines and Ethics* on the Bureau's web site at www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/camping
- ***Motorized Camping*** is defined as overnight camping in or near the vehicle where the vehicle continues to be used for storage or transportation. Many designated campsites are available on State Forest lands. Please view the *Motorized Camping Guidelines and Ethics* document on the Bureau's web site at www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/camping

- **Group Camping** is defined as more than 10 people in a unit, overnight motorized or primitive camping. A **Letter of Authorization** (see above) must first be obtained from the District Forester. A Camping Permit and Letter of Authorization are issued to the group. There is no fee for a Camping Permit
- A designated campsite is a relatively small, distinctly defined area, accessible from a State Forest road or drivable trail, to accommodate one vehicle, a fire ring, and space for the camping unit. Each site is identified with a vertical post indicating the site number at its entrance.

Camping Permits - Primitive campers spending no more than one night at a campsite do not need a Camping Permit. However, a Camping Permit is required if:

- You desire an emergency point-of-contact
- You stay at a campsite more than one night
- A campfire is desired during spring or fall fire seasons
- You camp using a vehicle for storage or transportation
- You are "group camping"
- You camp within the Pine Creek Gorge in Tiadaghton or Tioga State Forests

If you are interested in camping on State Forests lands, choose a State Forest you are interested in, and contact the district office to determine where to camp or if designated campsites are available. The district office will issue a camping permit, if needed.

There is no fee for a Camping Permit

A limited number of motorized camping sites are available through the Camping Permit Online Application

Hiking

Hiking trails have been developed in most Forest Districts. Hiking trails are divided into four categories: National Scenic, State Forest Hiking Trails, local district trails and interpretive trails. For more information on hiking trails, see the Hiking web page at www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/hiking and individual State Forest web pages.

State Forest Trails Award – This award is given to any hiker who completes the entire 780 miles of the State Forest Hiking Trail system.

Mountain Biking

All state forest roads are open to mountain bicycling. In addition, many rail trails and district trails are available for riding.

Horseback Riding

Nearly all of the district trails and roads are available for this use. All 2.1 million acres of state forest land is available for cross-country riding. Two trails within Pennsylvania's state forests are specifically designed to accommodate equestrian use. They are the Thunder Mountain Equestrian Trail, located within the Elk State Forest, and the Bridle Trail, in the Loyalsock State Forest (formerly the Wyoming SF). Both of these trails offer many hours of excellent riding through a wide variety of landscapes and forest types.

Canoeing/Kayaking/Boating/Rafting

Pennsylvania is second only to Alaska in the number of miles of streams in one state. There is also an abundance of lakes and ponds.

Cross-country Skiing

The Bureau of Forestry has cross-country ski trails in almost every forest district. Most of the trails and low-use and gated roads are also available for cross-country skiing when they are snow covered.

Birding/Nature Observation

Bird watching and nature observation are uses that can potentially occur on the entire 2.1 million acres of state forest land.

Scenic Driving/Pleasure Driving

This is the largest recreational use of state forest lands. Most recreational users participate in this activity coming to and from the state forest, but for many this is the sole purpose of their visit to state forest land.

All-Terrain Vehicle Riding

All-terrain vehicle ownership is at an all time high in the Commonwealth. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources provides a system of trails designated for use by all-terrain vehicles within Pennsylvania's State Forests. The current ATV trail system has grown to 10 state forest trail systems.

Minimizing environmental impact

Every effort should be made to minimize the impact of ATV's on the trail and surrounding environment. Using skill and common sense riders can negotiate various obstacles and riding conditions that have the potential to cause damage. Areas closed to ATVs and snowmobiles are done so for a reason; riders must respect these special areas.

The following are some suggestions offered by Tread Lightly!®, a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the outdoors and outdoor recreation through responsible practices:

- Stay on designated roads and trails or other areas open for use.
- Avoid "spooking" livestock and wildlife you encounter.
- Cross streams at designated crossings only.
- Use existing campsites whenever possible; avoid building fires.
- Cross obstacles at an angle, one wheel at a time.
- Don't straddle large rocks.
- Avoid mud if you can while remaining on the road or trail.
- Turn into ravines or large depressions at about a 45-degree angle.
- Straddle ruts, even if they are wider than your vehicle. This will keep your vehicle level.
- Lower the tire pressure to where you see a bulge in your tire to give you better traction and provide for a smoother ride.
- Avoid riding the brakes and clutch which can lead to brake failure.

Trail etiquette

Many times ATV riders will come in contact with other user groups sharing the same lands, roadways or trails. It is important to practice common courtesies.

- Be considerate of others on the trail and keep to the right.
- Slow down when passing.
- Ride only where permitted.
- Leave gates as you find them.
- Yield the right of way to bikes, horses and hikers.
- Carry out what you carry in.
- Wave and say 'hello' as you pass.
- Report downed trees and trail maintenance needs to land managers

Report illegal riding

If you see someone riding irresponsibly, off-trail or dangerously, try to record the machine's registration number. Report the activity to the local authority with jurisdiction over those lands. Remember, bad behavior by some individuals can harm the reputation of the entire sport.

Motorized Trail Bike Riding

The Bureau of Forestry offers two motorized trail bike (motorcycle) trails. The Seven Mountains Ramble and Shade Mountain trails are both located in portions of Mifflin, Snyder, and Union Counties in the Bald Eagle State Forest. The Seven Mountains Ramble trail is designated for dual-sport (licensed for highway use) trail bikes and the Shade Mountain trail is for non-licensed, off-highway trail bikes. Trail maps are available at the Bald Eagle State Forest office.

Snowmobiling

Snowmobile trails and joint-use roads are maintained in 18 districts across the state. Many of these trails are groomed, and access parking lots are maintained. **The minimum age for snowmobile operators in Pennsylvania has been raised to 10 years of age.** Senate Bill 1056, signed by the Governor on June 29, 2006, changed the minimum age for youngsters to lawfully operate snowmobiles from 8 years of age, back to 10 years of age.

Minimizing environmental impact

Every effort should be made to minimize the impact of snowmobiles on the trail and surrounding environment. The following are some suggestions offered by Tread Lightly!®, a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the outdoors and outdoor recreation through responsible practices:

- Pump your brakes when going downhill to avoid locking the brakes.
- Lean into turns with your upper body to enhance the sled's maneuverability.
- Avoid riding on frozen lakes or other waterways.
- Cross roadways at a 90-degree angle to the road.

Trail etiquette for snowmobiles is similar to that for ATV's listed above.

Hunting

Hunting in accordance with Pennsylvania Game Laws remains a popular recreational activity on nearly all the forestlands managed by the Bureau of Forestry.

Motorized Vehicle Access to State Forest Land by Persons with Disabilities

DCNR issues letters of authorization for persons with disabilities to use motorized vehicles on designated roads and off-road areas of State Forest land. To qualify for this program, a person must have a permanent disability that severely restricts the ability to walk.

Miscellaneous Recreation

State Forest land is host to an almost endless list of other recreational uses. These include astronomy, dog sledding, geo-caching, gold panning, jogging, hang gliding, ice-skating, motorcycle riding, orienteering, photography, rock climbing, rappelling, sleigh riding, sledding, snowboarding, snowshoeing, spelunking, swimming, snorkeling and tubing. All these and more are permitted uses of state forest land.

Information on recreational opportunities can also be found within individual State Forests web pages at: www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/stateforests